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Week of
September 9, 1940

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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* *Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of Sept. 9, 1940.*

† "Kind Lady" opened last Tuesday, September 3rd, at the Playhouse Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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New York Herald Tribune	**New York World-Telegram**

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"Kind Lady"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *September 4, 1940*

Grace George Opens a New Broadway Season In a Revival of Chodorov's "Kind Lady"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS THE first item in a new theatrical season, Grace George offers a revival of "Kind Lady." She appeared in it at the Playhouse last evening under the auspices of William A. Brady, who is a member of her family. If, like a Broadway flaneur, you approach revivals with well-bred diffidence, prepare yourself for a fresh experience. For Edward Chodorov's "Kind Lady" is just as tingling now as it was in 1935, when it first began to tighten nerves in this vicinity, and Miss George is playing it with greater sensitivity and skill. It is her part by virtue of the expertness of her acting. You might add that it is also her play, although as a matter of record Mr. Chodorov made it from one of Hugh Walpole's stories. For Miss George's acting pulls the story together, and one of the best melodramas of the modern theatre, infinitely superior to "Ladies in Retirement," is now visible in Forty-eighth Street in a crackling performance.

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All this is on the evidence of one theatregoer who knew the plot only too well before he strolled with composure and a friend into the Playhouse last evening. Familiarity with the plot of a melodrama is supposed to breed contempt. But the plot of "Kind Lady" is probably not a matter of decisive importance. For this is the story of an unctuous and sinister fellow who slips into an English gentlewoman's home on a pretext of asking for charity; and then, in company with some odious accomplices, moves in, imprisons her, tortures her suavely and very nearly succeeds in wringing all her possessions out of her control. In 1935 he seemed like the meanest man in the world. Although the standards of meanness have gone up considerably since 1935, he still seems like a ranking blackguard worth as much hating as you can manage between the hours of 8:50 and 11.

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In a story as simple as that, the vital theatrical elements are the suggestions of character, the cool deliberation of the style and the calm objectivity of the staging. Mr. Chodorov has told his story with mischievous detachment. The mood alters from ordinary friendliness to ominous villainy before you realize it. The callousness of the characters develops slyly. Scene by scene the pressure of these vultures against this helpless lady becomes so agonizing that the theatregoers are more relieved than she is when at length she contrives her deliverance. In the original version Mr. Chodorov told this blood-chilling yarn craftily enough without wasting a word. The revival improves on the original a little by eliminating the prologue.

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A slight woman with gentle radiance and dainty manners, Miss George is pefectly cast as the kind lady. The episode in evil becomes almost unbearably cruel when she serves as victim. Since the opening five years ago she has played the part a good many times. She has been skipping across the countryside with it all Summer. Now she knows all the lights and shadows of a monstrous story and how much of it to suggest by pauses and mental asides. Between the second and third acts her health fails rapidly enough to become a cause for alarm. Her performance is downright superb.

Under Felix Jacoves's direction, and inside an excellent setting by Watson Barratt, the performance as a whole is worthy of her acting. In the part originally played by Henry Daniell, Stiano Braggiotti has his own ideas of disarming treachery, and they are good ones. Elfrida Derwent's whining cruelty and Oscar Stirling's nasal obsequiousness would make your hair stand on end. Among those present and pleasant are Clarence Derwent, Iva Troutman and Joan Wetmore.

There is quite a shudder show at the Playhouse.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *September 4, 1940*

Season's Start

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ONE of the best of the polite school of urbanely chilling English horror plays was "Kind Lady," adapted by the American Edward Chodorov from a story by Hugh Walpole, in which Miss Grace George and Henry Daniell terrified audiences only too briefly back in the golden days of 1935. Now, to open the dramatic season of 1940-'41, William A. Brady brings us a new production of the drama about the efforts of a sinister band of crooks to drive a nice old lady crazy, with Miss George again playing brilliantly as the unhappy heroine but with Mr. Daniell unfortunately absent from the role of the evil master mind of the gang. Without Mr. Daniell, who is one of the most effective actors now at large, "Kind Lady" loses a great deal of its malignant power and its air of brooding horror, but it remains, for all that, an effective and resourceful thriller.

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One insistent moral that these British melodramas teach is the great peril of hospitality. In "Ladies in Retirement," you will remember, an ex-Gayety girl was kind to her housekeeper and got walled up in a brick oven as a reward. In "Night Must Fall," a matron in a wheel chair was amiable to a handsome young bell boy and had her head cut off for her pains. In "Kind Lady," the friendly heroine bestows charity upon a shabby painter, only to have him and his gang move in on her and proceed to drive her into madness. It is, of course, the slow hint of insanity, with even the poor lady beginning to suspect that she is mad, which makes for the horror of the play, and it is the victim's inability to get through to the outside world or to persuade those who will listen that she is sane which provides the effective suspense. "Kind Lady" manages all these things with considerable shrewdness.

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It apparently is a necessity of this sort of play that it should begin slowly and mount toward a climax chiefly through suggestions of terror and doom. The result of this is that the first act of "Kind Lady" is mild and placid story-telling, given its effectiveness chiefly by the hint of horror that the actors can get into their work. Miss George is entirely successful in showing the slow, agonizing breakdown of the heroine's mind, but the suspense of the first act must come entirely from the ominous presence of the main villain, who must suggest evil to you even before he does anything menacing. It is not an easy task for an actor, but Mr. Daniell, in the original production, managed it so brilliantly that he could scare you by his calmest movements and yet indicate the fake charm of the man that had so impressed the old lady. Unfortunately this role is now played by Stiano Braggiotti, who makes the villain a completely conventional scoundrel without the menace or the force or the sinister charm that is so vital to the part.

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Miss George is always a delightful actress, and her portrait of the harried lady of the title is one of her finest achievements. Some of the members of the supporting cast, in addition to Mr. Braggiotti, leave much to be desired, but it is impossible to imagine Miss George's playing improved upon. Hers is a characteristically distinguished portrayal. Of the other players, I should say that Elfrida Derwent as the housekeeper of the gang was the most successful. In a few respects the direction is not all that it might have been. The second act climax, for example, is dragged out unfortunately, and the brief part of the pilfering child of the gang is so directed that the character loses its point. Chiefly, though, it is Mr. Daniell who is missed. Nevertheless "Kind Lady" remains an entertaining melodrama, and it opens the new season in much happier fashion than usual.

"Kind Lady"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *September 4, 1940*

William A. Brady Revives "Kind Lady" to Start the Season at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FIVE years ago all properly receptive spines played host to shivers when suave and low-voiced villians beset Miss Grace George in "Kind Lady," a deftly frightening play which Edward Chodorov fashioned from a story by Hugh Walpole. Remembering this, William A. Brady brought "Kind Lady" out of retirement last evening at the Playhouse, and so started the new season off with one of the best of scares. It was a good evening to shiver, too.

Nothing has happened to the play, or to Miss George, in the interim. She is still a tiny, graceful figure as she plays Mary Herries, into whose comfortable London house monsters crept one Christmas Eve. The play is still an admirable study in terror, all the more effective in that in it no voices are raised and no threats made overt. The monsters were quite ordinary people, you may remember. Their leader was a well-spoken gentleman and art lover, and all he wanted at first was a cup of tea. And Mary Herries was a gracious and confident lady who was merely being kind.

All is quiet and harmless in the beginning, but before the end there is a kind of nightmare quality in it. The leader moves in by ruse and brings others with him—a mumbling half-wit, a horribly jolly villain who is the more terrifying for his oily kindliness, an implacable slattern and a twisted magpie of a child. They move in and take over, as all who saw the play in 1935 must recall. They close in around dwindling Mary Herries, driving her friends away and blocking her twisting efforts to escape and slowly draining away all her money and all her strength. Finally—but for the benefit of those who still have a good scare coming—I shall not report on what finally happens. Those who wish to know how Mary Herries escapes, if she does escape, will have to go to the Playhouse to find out, for all me.

"Kind Lady" is one of the small masterpieces of its kind, recommended to those who like to glimpse the terrors of the mind from a safe distance. It did not do so well five years ago; perhaps the noisy horrors which have intervened may make us more appreciative of its quiet, rather subtle picture of menace which steps softly.

Miss George is, as she was before, gracefully touching as the terrified lady. One or two others of the original cast—notably Elfrida Derwent, who must frighten herself at times as Mrs. Edwards—are among the participants. I don't know that it is quite as suavely acted all around as it was in the first instance, but Stiano Braggiotti, Oscar Stirling, Clarence Derwent and the rest are good enough to scare anybody out of, at the very least, an evening's growth.

'KIND LADY'

A play in three acts and an epilogue by Edward Chodorov, adapted from a story by Hugh Walpole; staged by Felix Jacoves; setting by Watson Barratt. Revived by William A. Brady at the Playhouse on September 3, 1940. The cast:

Lucy Weston	Ivy Troutman
Rose	Marie Paxton
Phyllis Glenning	Joan Wetmore
Peter Santard	Melchor Ferrer
Mary Herries	Grace George
Henry Abbott	Stiano Braggiotti
Ada	Dorothy McGuire
Doctor	Wyllie Adams
Mr. Edwards	Oscar Stirling
Mrs. Edwards	Elfrida Derwent
Aggie Edwards	Grace Dougherty
Gustav Rosenberg	Clarence Derwent
Mr. Foster	John Robb

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *September 4, 1940*

Grace George Returns in A Revival of "Kind Lady"

By WILELLA WALDORF

WILLIAM A. BRADY opened the new Broadway theatrical season last night at the Playhouse with the genteel British shudder drama entitled "Kind Lady," originally produced here in the spring of 1935 by H. C. Potter and George Haight. Grace George played the title role in that first production and this summer found her making a discreet tour of the resort theatres in the same part. It seemed to Mr. Brady that the play still had plenty of life to it, and he suddenly decided last week to try a Broadway revival. After viewing it at the Playhouse last night, we are inclined to agree with him that it is, on the whole, an excellent idea.

Back in 1935 Edward Chodorov's dramatization of one of Hugh Walpole's sinister stories entitled "The Silver Mask" was given in a prologue, three acts and an epilogue. Now at the Playhouse they've omitted the prologue, which originally introduced Mr. Foster, the man from the bank, as we recall it. Mr. Foster now comes in only at the end, just in time to save kind, kind Miss Herries from the clutches of a cold-blooded gang of criminals whose plan it is to take over the lady's worldly goods by methods polite but firm.

It is hardly necessary to go too far into the plot of "Kind Lady" and thus spoil some of the thrills for those who happened to have missed it five years ago, but it may be said cautiously that it concerns the plight of a nice, soft-hearted maiden lady living quietly in Montague Square, London, who invites a poor vagrant in for a cup of tea on Christmas eve. The vagrant turns out to be something of a connoisseur of the arts, and Miss Herries possesses not only an early El Greco but a genuine Whistler and other rare and costly objects much prized by collectors.

Next day the vagrant's wife faints on the Kind Lady's doorstep, and the lady suddenly finds herself in the power of a whole gang of crooks, who promptly board up the house and pretend its owner has departed on a trip around the world.

The play is somewhat deliberate and a bit tedious in laying its foundation, but once Miss Herries is trapped it becomes more and more exciting as she tries to find her way out. An obtuse art dealer from Paris is even permitted to converse with the prisoner without scenting the true state of affairs. "Kind Lady" has the virtue of developing a state of mounting terror in its audience, and last night's company managed to squeeze plenty of suspense out of the three acts and epilogue.

Miss George seemed, if possible, even better at it than she was before, and she was very ably assisted by Stiano Braggiotti in the role of the vagrant, originally acted here by Henry Daniell. Clarence Derwent made a brief but effective appearance as the art dealer from Paris, and the others all helped. Two of the original 1935 cast, Elfrida Derwent and Marie Paxton, were on hand to aid Miss George in keeping up the tension.

Five years ago when John Mason Brown said some pleasant things about "Kind Lady," a fault-finder who called himself "Ole Sauerpuss" wrote in pointing out all sorts of leaks in the plot structure and waxing very technical on the subject of famous paintings. No doubt there are plenty of weak spots to be discovered in most thrillers of the "Kind Lady" sort, but to everybody but Ole Sauerpuss and his ilk we do not hesitate to recommend an interesting evening at the Playhouse with Miss George and her terrifying captors.